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1st

A Discourse

THE

Lay-Christian's OBLIGATION

To Read The

Holy Scriptures.

Imprimatur.

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Coloss. III. 16.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all Wisdom.

WHich words are an intire Precept of themselves; those which follow in the same Verse, (*teaching and admonishing*, &c.) being another distinct from it.

As preparatory to that which I intend from them, I shall premise these two things: First, To whom this Precept is address'd. Secondly, What is the import of the Duty here injoyn'd.

1. The persons to whom the Precept is address'd, were the *Saints and faithful Brethren in Christ that were at Colosse* (for to them the Epistle is directed *c.* 1. *v.* 2.) That is, all the Christians at *Colosse*, of what order or quality soever. For these titles (*Saints and faithful Brethren*) were not confined to any one order of Men, but vouchsafed in common to all Christians. Who were all call'd *Saints*, as they were by Baptism separated from the idolatrous World, and consecrated to the service of the true God: *Brethren*, as by Regeneration and Adoption, they were all become the Sons of that one God and Father: *Faithful*, as they persever'd in that profession, notwithstanding all Temptations to the contrary.

It cannot therefore be question'd, but that this Command was given to the Laity, as well as the Clergy; Yea to the Laity, rather than the Clergy; because it doth not appear, that there were more than two Church-men at *Colosse*, at the time when this Epistle was directed to them, namely, *Archippus* and *Philemon*; for *Epaphras*, by whom they had been first converted to the Christian Faith, was now in bonds with S. *Paul* at *Rome*, Phil. 23.

2. The Duty here enjoyn'd these Lay-Christians is, That *the word of Christ dwell in them richly, in all Wisdom.* Though by *the word of Christ*, is meant more especially that word, which was at first spoken by Christ himself in person, and afterward confirm'd by his Apostles; yet it is not to be confin'd to that alone, but extended to that also, which was long before deliver'd by *Moses* and the Prophets. For since *Moses* and the Prophets, not only spake of Christ, but
1 Pet. 1. 11. it was also the Spirit of Christ by which they spake, (as S. *Peter* expressly tells us) the word spoken by them, was no less the *word of Christ*, than that which was preach'd by Christ himself. In brief, the whole divinely inspired Scripture, is *the word of Christ*, both as he is the Author, and the principal scope and matter of it.

Now what is the Duty these Lay-Christians are exhorted to with respect to this *word of Christ*? Is it not to read it? Not to give it room so much as in their houses? No, but to give it entertainment in their Hearts. To *let it dwell in them*, to let it dwell in them *richly*, to let it dwell in them richly, *in all Wisdom.*

1. That it *dwell in them.* It is not said, dwell *with*, but more emphatically dwell *in* them: Which denotes especially, That they accustom themselves to the attentive reading and study of it, till it become their Intimate and Familiar, be habitually present to their minds, as frequently and upon all occasions in their thoughts, as a person is in the house in which he dwells. Though a Man may perhaps have but little converse with those who dwell in the same House *with* him; yet he can be no more estrang'd from that which dwells *in* him, than he can from his own thoughts and inclinations.

2. Nor will it suffice, That it barely dwell in them, but it must dwell in them *richly*: which may have respect both to the word it self, Let the *word* dwell richly; and to the subject in which it dwells, Let it dwell *in you* richly. 1. To the word it self. It is not enough, that it dwell in them *sparingly*, that they give entertainment to a passage here

here and there which beſt complyes with their own Humors; but they muſt entertain it indifferently, one part with another; The Commands muſt be received, with the like readineſs as the Promiſes; Nor muſt they think by admitting one Command, to compound with God for the rejection of another; but thoſe Commands muſt be looked upon as worthy of all acceptation, which moſt directly contradict their moſt beloved luſts. 2. To the ſubject in which it dwells. It muſt not as a Sojourner be confined to a ſingle room, to ſome one power of the Soul (as it is in too many, who give it entertainment in their underſtandings, but ſuffer it to have no place in their Wills and Affections) but it muſt be admitted into, and make its abode in every Faculty; in the Mind to enlighten it, in the Conſcience to awaken it, in the Will to bow it to an humble ſubmiſſion to the Divine Will. It muſt take poſſeſſion of the whole Man, like as Leven (to which the Goſpel is compared) diffuſes it ſelf thorough the whole lump. For

3. In both theſe reſpects it muſt dwell in them ſo plenteouſly, as to enrich them, not only with ſome one kind of Wiſdom, but with *all Wiſdom*. To bring them to the Knowledge, Belief and Practice of whatſoever is required to make them compleatly happy for ever. For that alone is accounted Wiſdom in the Scripture ſenſe, by which a Man is made *wiſe to Salvation*. All other Wiſdom in compariſon with this, being but a more creditable piece of Folly.

From the words thus explained, many Doctrines are clearly deducible. As

1. That it is the Duty of Lay-Chriſtians to acquaint themſelves with the holy Scriptures: This is plain, becauſe they are here commanded to let the word of Chriſt dwell in them.

2. That the holy Scriptures contain all things neceſſary to Salvation. This is alſo as evident. For where a Man may learn not only *Wiſdom*, but *all Wiſdom*, there can be nothing wanting that is neceſſary to Salvation.

3. That

3. That all things neceſſary to Salvation, are ſo clearly contain'd in the holy Scriptures, that the common ſort of Chriſtians may attain to the underſtanding of them. For how can the word dwell in them *in all Wiſdom*, if any part of that Wiſdom which is neceſſary to Salvation, be ſo obſcurely expreſs'd, that they cannot underſtand the meaning of it?

The firſt of theſe is that which I intend at preſent to inſiſt upon, *viz. The obligation that lies upon Lay-Chriſtians, to acquaint themſelves with the holy Scriptures.* This is the leaſt that can be hence inferr'd, ſince without this, the Scriptures cannot be ſaid to *dwell in them*, much leſs to dwell in them *richly*, and *in all Wiſdom.*

But though this is ſo plainly contain'd in the words, that nothing can be more; yet becauſe it is a Duty not only queſtion'd by ſome, but expreſsly denied by others, I ſhall therefore confirm it by other ſuch arguments, as may be of force, not only to convince your Judgments of the Truth, but to engage your Wills to the Practice of it. As

I. Becauſe the holy Scriptures were by God himſelf at firſt directed and addreſs'd to Lay-men. That this Epiſtle to the *Coloſſians* was ſo, you have ſeen already. I ſhall now ſhew the ſame concerning other parts of holy Scripture.

The Moral Law was ſpoken by God to all the People, in ſuch an audible Voice, that they might all hear it. *The Lord ſpake unto you out of the midſt of the fire*, ſays *Moſes*, *Ye heard the voice of the words, and he declared unto you his Covenant.* So clearly and plainly did God deliver this Law to them, that he is ſaid to *talk with them face to face.* The Statutes and the Judgments, that is, the Ordinances concerning Ceremonial Worſhip, and the Laws about matters of Right between Man and Man, were not indeed ſpoken immediately to the People (no more were they to the Prieſts) but to *Moſes* himſelf, who by God's command recited them

Deut 4. 12, 13.

Deut. 5. 4.

to

to the People, and wrote them in a Book, from which they might take a Copy of them. Exod. 24. 3, 4. Deut. 31.

Nor were the Sermons of the *Prophets* committed to the *Prieſts* cuſtody, that according to their diſcretion the People might either more or leſs, or not at all be made acquainted with them; but they were by the Prophets addreſs'd to the People themſelves. So God commanded them. *Go and cry in the ears of Jeruſalem, ſtand in the gate of the Lord's houſe and proclaim theſe words, and ſay, Hear the word of the Lord all ye of Judah,* &c. Jer. 2. 2. And ſo the Prophets accordingly did. *Hear the word of the Lord,* ſaith *Jeremy, O houſe of Jacob.* Jer. 7. 2. *Hear the word which the Lord hath ſpoken againſt you, O Children of Iſrael,* ſaith the Prophet *Amos, Hear the word of the Lord ye Kine of Baſhan which are in the Mountain of Samaria.* Jer. 2. 4. Amos 3. 1. Amos 4. 1. It is needleſs to inſiſt upon the proof of this, ſince nothing is more obvious, than that the Exhortations, Admonitions and Reproofs of the Prophets, were not only delivered in the audience of the People, but that thoſe of them in which the People were concern'd, were expreſsly directed to them. And therefore when *Jeremy* was ſhut up in the Dungeon, and could not ſpeak to the People himſelf, he commanded *Baruch* to write all the words of his Prophecy in a Book, and read them in the ears of all the People in *Jeruſalem*, and of all the people which came from the Cities of *Judah* to *Jeruſalem.* Jer. 36. 8, 9.

In like manner our bleſſed Saviour, though he ſpake as never Man ſpake, yet was he contented with the vulgar ſort of hearers. His firſt ſolemn Sermon was preached to his Diſciples; not to the twelve only, but to all thoſe who were deſirous to be inſtructed by him, out of which he choſe the twelve who were afterward call'd Apoſtles. But though his ſpeech was directed to his Diſciples, yet he ſo ſpake, as that the multitude alſo (who ſtood at a greater diſtance) might hear him; for S. *Matthew* expreſsly tells us, that the multitudes (οἱ ὄχλοι) were aſtoniſhed at his Doctrine. Matth. 7. 28. His

Sermons

Sermons at *Capernaum*, *Nazareth*, by the Sea side, and in the Wilderness, were they preached to Priests only? No, his Auditors for the most part were the rude and unlearned People. And can any Man reasonably suppose, that he would not have those Sermons read by Lay-men, which he thought fit to preach to such?

The Apostles of our Lord, not only preached to the common People, but sent their Epistles also to them. The Epistles of S. *Paul* are for the most part directed to the *Saints*, to the *faithful in Christ Jesus*, to the *beloved*; all which titles in those days, were used in the same latitude, as the name *Christian* is now with us. And that no Man may imagine they were to be confined to Christians of a higher rank, they are expressly directed to *all*. So the E-
Rom. 1.7. pistle to the *Romans*; *To* all *that are at* Rome *beloved of God*, call'd to be Saints. The first Epistle to the *Corin-*
1 Corinth. 1. 2. *thians*. To the Church of God at *Corinth*, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints, to *all*, that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
2 Cor. 1.1. The second Epistle. To the Church of God which is at *Corinth*, with *all* the Saints which are in all *Achaia*. The E-
Philip. 1. 1. pistle to the *Philippians*, to *all* the Saints which are at *Philippi*.

The Epistles of S. *James*, S. *Peter* and S. *Jude*, were written to all the dispersed Jewish Christians. The first Epistle of S. *John*, to *little Children*, *young Men*, and *Fathers*; that is, to Christians of all sizes and degrees. The second, To an *elect Lady and her Children*. The third, To a private Christian. To conclude this argument; No Man can in reason suppose, but that those persons should read their Epistles, to whom they wrote them: since therefore they wrote them to Lay-men, it cannot be imagined it was their intention, That Priests only should read them.

II. Nor were the holy Scriptures only addressed to Lay-men, but (which is more) they also were plainly commanded to read, and acquaint themselves familiarly with them

them. Thus God commanded the *Jews*, with reſpect to the Law given to them. *The words which I command thee this day ſhall be in thine heart; and thou ſhalt teach them diligently to thy Children, and ſhalt talk of them, when thou ſitteſt in thine houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the way, when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up; and thou ſhalt bind them for a ſign upon thine hand*, &c. Deut. 6. 6, 7, 8. What is the import of this Command, but that they ſhould familiarly converſe with the Divine Law? make it the matter of their daily meditation and diſcourſe; and that they ſhould not think it enough to acquaint *themſelves* with it, but ſhould take care to teach it to their *Children*, that the knowledge thereof might never fail, but deſcend from one generation to another. And to whom was this Command given? Not to the Prieſts and Levites only, but to the whole Body of the *Iſraelites*, *Hear O Iſrael.* The ſame in effect God afterward commanded *Joſhua. This Book of the Law ſhall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou ſhalt meditate therein day and night.* Deut. 6. 4. Joſh. 1. 8. It might not depart out of his mouth, he was therefore to read it and talk of it; and not only ſo, but to meditate therein day and night. Not that they were obliged in every moment of time to be thinking or ſpeaking of the Law of God, for that cannot be; and in caſe it could, it could not be a Duty, becauſe it would be inconſiſtent with other Commands: But that they were to take all fit occaſions, and beſides the more ſolemn ſeaſons, even in their worldly buſineſſes and Recreations, ſhould intermix ſome ſerious thoughts of it, to ſeaſon them withal: At leaſt, That they ſhould be often in this ſort of exerciſe, and never ſuffer any long ſpace of time to paſs wholly without it.

And to ſhew how highly God valu'd this Commandment, he promiſed the greateſt Reward to the diligent Obſervers of it. Of all the Promiſes of the Jewiſh Law, that of long life was the moſt deſirable; and therefore *length of days*, is placed by *Solomon* in the *right hand of Wiſdom*, as having Prov. 3. 16.

the preeminence of *Riches and Honour*. And this God promised the *Jews*, both for themselves and their Children after them, to quicken their obedience to this Command-

Deut. 11. 18, 19, 20, 21. ment. *Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your Soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand*, &c. *That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your Children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your Fathers, to give them, as the days of Heaven upon the Earth.*

Psal. 1. 3. Psal. 19. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. Prov. 6. 22, 23. Prov. 8. 2, 3. In succeeding times, the same Duty is inforc'd by *David* and *Solomon*, with great variety of powerful motives, taken from the excellency of the Laws themselves, and the inestimable benefits that do accrue to Men by the study and practice of them.

And as God enjoyn'd this to the *Jews*, so in obedience to his Command, we find, That in the days of our blessed Saviour, the reading of the Scriptures was the common practice of that People. That question he frequently put to them, *have ye not read?* plainly implies, that they had read the Scriptures. Yea, That Women were then so learned in the Scriptures, as to be able to instruct their Children therein; for S. *Paul* tells us, That *Timothy* had *known*

2 Tim. 3. 16. *the Holy* Scriptures from a Child; which because he could not learn from his Father, who was a Heathen; his so early instruction in the knowledge of them, was owing to his

2 Tim. 1. 5. Grand-mother *Lois*, and his Mother *Eunice*, whose faith we find before commended.

For the Scriptures of the new Testament. 1. As it is certain, That at the first writing of them, they were read

2 Corinth. 1. 13. by the People: For S. *Paul* speaking to such, says, *We write none other things to you, than what you read.* And again;

Ephes. 3. 4. *When ye read*, saith he to the *Ephesians*, *Ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.* And 2. As it is certain, That the directing them to Laymen, was a virtual command to them to read them. So 3. No injunction can be more full to this purpose than that in the words of my Text. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all Wisdom.*

Wiſdom. Think it not enough, to give it entertainment now and then, as you do to a ſtranger, but let it dwell in you; and that not ſparingly, but ſo plentifully, that you may thereby abound in all Spiritual Wiſdom.

III. That the People are obliged to acquaint themſelves with the Holy Scriptures, will further appear, if we conſider the ſubject matter of them; That being ſuch as concerns the People, as well as the Prieſts. Should the King put forth a Declaration of his Will and Pleaſure, which concern'd all States and orders of Men within his Dominions, would it not be the Duty of his Lay-Subjects, no leſs than of his Clergy, to enquire into it? the caſe is not unlike in the matter now before us. Whether we conſider the Doctrines, the Precepts, the Promiſes, or the Threatnings contained in the Holy Scripture, we ſhall find that *all* Men (People and Prieſts, learned and unlearned) have a common concern in them.

1. For the Doctrines. Every Man that is baptized hath obliged himſelf by Vow to believe all the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith: And every Man doubtleſs is concern'd in all thoſe Doctrines which he hath ſo ſolemnly Vowed to believe. Yea had he never made any ſuch Vow, yet all thoſe Doctrines, the belief of which is neceſſary to Salvation, he is as much concern'd to believe, as he is to be ſaved, and by neceſſary conſequence to acquaint himſelf with them; for can a Man believe that which he doth not know? Some Men, I know, tell us, that a Man may; That though he know not one Article of the Creed, yet if he believes, all that the Church believes, he may be ſaid to believe them all, becauſe the Church believes them. But if this be ſo, then a meer Heathen who never ſo much as heard of Chriſt, may be a right Catholick Believer; for ſince he believes in the groſs whatſoever God hath revealed, he may by the ſame way of believing, be ſaid to believe, That Jeſus is the only Son of God, that he was

conceived by the Holy Ghoſt, *&c.* becauſe theſe are ſuch Articles as God hath clearly revealed.

2. For the Commandments of God, Lay-men are concern'd to know them, becauſe they are concern'd to do them; they being no leſs the rule of their practice, than they are of Clergymens. Let it be ſhew'd, that any one Command of the Moral Law given by *Moſes*, did not extend to every *Jew*; Or that any one Command of the Chriſtian Law, deliver'd by our Saviour in his Sermon upon the Mount; does not oblige every Chriſtian, and we ſhall then grant, that thoſe perſons who are not bound to obey them, are no way oblig'd to make enquiry after them. The Clergy of the *Church of Rome*, in their Catechiſms for the uſe of the vulgar, have indeed commonly left out the Second Commandment; but the reaſon is, not becauſe they think the People are not concern'd to know it, but becauſe it highly concerns themſelves, to keep the People in ignorance of it, becauſe they have taught them to practiſe, ſo plainly contrary to it.

3. The Promiſes can no leſs concern Lay-men, becauſe they were made on purpoſe to invite and encourage Men to yield obedience to the Commands; unleſs it may be ſuppoſed, that the Laity are ſo forward of their own accord to do their duty, that they need no incitement; but the Clergy ſo backward and averſe, that they will not be brought to it without ſuch powerful Inducements.

4. For the threatnings of Divine vengeance in caſe of Diſobedience, it muſt be alſo granted, that the Laity are as much concern'd to know them, as the Clergy; if it be granted, that the Laity are as prone to break the Commandments of God, and as hardly reſtrain'd from ſin, as the Clergy are; which, I ſuppoſe, will not be denied, by thoſe perſons we now argue againſt.

It is needleſs to proceed to other matters, ſince by what hath been already deliver'd it is manifeſt enough, That the things contain'd in Holy Scripture, are not appropriated to Church-men, but of ſuch univerſal concernment, that every perſon

perſon of what rank or quality ſoever, is obliged to ſearch into them.

IV. And for the Commandments eſpecially, let it be further conſider'd, That there are ſome Commands laid upon Lay-men, as well as others, which no Man can be capable of yielding obedience to, who is not converſant in the Holy Writings. I ſhall inſtance in three only. 1. To inſtruct their Children in the Scriptures. 2. To try the Spirits whether they be of God. 3. To give a reaſon of the hope that is in them.

1. To inſtruct their Children in the knowledge of the Scriptures. This God commanded the *Iſraelites* in the place frorecited. *The words which I command thee this day ſhall be in thine heart, and thou ſhalt teach them diligently to thy Children.* Of the like import is S. *Paul*'s injunction to Chriſtian Parents, To *bring up their Children, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* Hear what S. *Chryſoſtom* ſays upon theſe words. *Wouldſt thou have thy Son obedient, nurſe him up from the beginning in the inſtruction and admonition of the Lord. Think it not more than needful, that he hear the Divine Scriptures; for there he will firſt hear this leſſon, Honour thy Father and thy Mother. Say not that this belongs to Monks; why doſt thou fear that which is greatly gainful? make him a Chriſtian. For it is moſt neceſſary for thoſe who converſe with the World, to know thoſe leſſons which are to be learnt from thence, eſpecially for Children.* And a little after he adds. *Let us make them from their childhood to apply themſelves to the reading of the Scriptures.* And can a Parent inſtruct his Children in the Scriptures, who does not ſtudy them himſelf? See alſo Deut. 4. 9. and chap. 32. 46.

2. To try the Spirits whether they be of God. This S. *John* commands, not only Biſhops and Prieſts, but all ſorts of Chriſtians to do. By *Spirits* are meant the Teachers who pretend to divine inſpiration; but now becauſe it cannot ordinarily be diſcerned, whether the Teachers are 1 Joh. 4. 1.

of

of God, but by the tryal of what they teach, they are therefore first to try the Doctrines, and as they find them either true or false, to conclude the Teacher either a true or a false Prophet.

Now the Scriptures being the Rule by which Doctrines are to be tried, how can a Man make this tryal, who is not acquainted with them? Yea, should we suppose, that the Scriptures are not the entire Rule (as the present *Church of Rome*, in contradiction to the antient Church, and the Scriptures themselves, teaches) but stand in need of unwritten Traditions to supply their defects: yet since the Romanists still grant them to be the Rule, of all those Doctrines they extend to; that whatsoever Doctrine is deliver'd in them, is infallibly true; whatsoever is contrary to any Doctrine deliver'd in them, is certainly false; It plainly follows, that no Man can be qualified for the tryal of Doctrines, who is a stranger to them; because no Man can know what Doctrines are either contrary or agreeable to the Scriptures, before he knows, what are contain'd in them.

1 Pet. 3. 15. 3. To give a reason of the Hope that is in them. *Be ready always*, says S. *Peter*, *to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.* When your Religion is opposed and persecuted, be ready not only to confess it, but to give a reason to every one that requires it, why you are Christians. And what reason can a Man who knows not the Scriptures give, why he is a Christian, rather than a *Mahometan*? unless the very same that a *Turk* can give, why he is a *Mahometan*, rather than a Christian, *viz.* That he had the good fortune to be born and bred in a Nation, where the Christian Religion was in fashion.

To conclude this argument: In that God commands those things to be done by Lay-men, which no Man can do without the knowledge of the Scriptures, he also commands them to acquaint themselves with the Scriptures; As he that

that requires the end, he alſo requires the uſe of thoſe means without which it cannot be obtained.

V. The uſes and ends to which the Holy Scriptures are by God deſigned, are a ſufficient proof of Lay-mens obligation to acquaint themſelves with them. 'Tis true, ſome parts of Scripture were intended for the uſe of Teachers, and others of Hearers, conſider'd as ſuch on purpoſe to inſtruct them in thoſe Duties which belong to them, as ſo diſtinguiſhed the one from the other. But beſides thoſe Texts which are proper to them, with reſpect to their different ranks and ſtations; the uſes to which the Scriptures are deſign'd, are ſuch which reſpect Men in common, both Laity and Clergy, of what degree or quality ſoever.

Such are in the general, To teach and inſtruct us in thoſe things by which we may be made wiſe to Salvation. S. *Paul* tells us, That *whatſoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning.* And if whatſoever was written by *Moſes* and the Prophets, to thoſe who lived before Chriſt came in the fleſh, to reveal the will of God more fully and clearly to us, was written not only for *their* learning, but for *ours* too; how much more whatſoever is written ſince by the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts? this being written for *our* learning only, and not for *theirs.* Rom. 15. 4.

More particularly

They are deſign'd to teach us, what is neceſſary for us to know, and believe, and do that we may be ſaved. *Theſe things are written,* ſays S. *John, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.* And *theſe things have I written to you, that ye ſin not.* To this purpoſe they teach us not only our Duty in general; but what are thoſe ſins in particular, that are to be avoided, and thoſe good works which God hath ordained that we ſhould walk in; and are admirably ſuted to the begetting and promoting of all thoſe heavenly Joh. 20. 31. 1 Joh. 2. 1.

venly virtues, by which we may be disposed and enabled to deny all sorts of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World; that having our fruit unto holiness here, our end may be everlasting life. In short, the *word of Christ*, is the great instrument which God hath ordained for the saving of Souls, and therefore it is call'd *the Grace of God which bringeth Salvation*; *the power of God to Salvation to every one that believeth*; *the Gospel of Salvation*. And certainly no Man can deny that these uses and ends of Holy Scriptures appertain to Lay-men, who does not place them in the order of Beasts, and deny that they have Souls capable of immortal Bliss.

Tit. 2. 11. Ephes. 1. 13. Rom. 1. 24. Jam. 1. 21.

Nor were they written to instruct the People as well as Priests in those points only of Faith and Practice, which concern them all in common as they are Men and Christians; but more particularly yet, to teach Lay-persons of both Sexes, of all Ages, Ranks and Relations, what Graces are most becoming, and how they ought to behave themselves in that age, place or relation in which they are: That Men and Women, both Elder and Younger; Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children, Masters and Servants, Magistrates and Subjects might there find what their respective Duties are, together with such motives as may be of force to engage them to the doing of them. And can it reasonably be supposed, when God hath so particularly prescribed in his word, to all sorts of Secular persons their Duties, as they stand distinguished one from another, by their different ranks and relations, that it is his pleasure they should not look into it, to see what these Duties are?

Furthermore, The Scriptures are design'd by God to teach Men, in all variety of fortunes, how to behave themselves, and to improve their lot (whatsoever it be) to their best advantage. Be a Man poor or rich, high or low, in honour or disgrace, in sickness or in health, he may learn from them, how to correct those evils which are incident to that condition

dition in which he is, and to make it ſubſervient to his greateſt good. Yea, be a Man's condition never ſo calamitous, though he *walk in darkneſs and ſee no light*, he may find in the *word of Chriſt*, thoſe inſtructions, directions, examples, precepts, promiſes, from which (if duly applyed) light will ariſe to him, in the midſt of his darkneſs. And therefore S. *Chryſoſtom* in his Comment on my Text, upon this account earneſtly exhorts the Men of the World to the ſtudy of the Scriptures. *Hearken I beſeech you*, ſays he, *all ye who are employ'd in the affairs of this life; get ye Bibles, the Medicines of your Souls. If you will have no more, yet get at leaſt the New Teſtament, the Acts of the Apoſtles, the Goſpels, your continual Teachers. If any grief happen to you, look into them, as the ſtorehouſe of Medicines, from thence fetch comfort in your calamities*, &c. And good reaſon had he thus to exhort them. For can any Man in his wits imagine, that God would have that concealed from the Laity, which he in mercy deſign'd for the Remedy of all their ſpiritual Maladies? For

VI. (Which plainly follows from what has been deliver'd) Have not the Laity as much need of the Holy Scriptures, as the Clergy? Are they not liable to as many ſpiritual Infirmities and Diſeaſes, and therefore ſtand in as great need of Medicines to prevent or remove them? Are they ſo well acquainted with their Duty, that they cannot know it better? and in caſe they were, yet are they not as ſlow to good, and as prone to evil as other Men, and therefore need as much to be quicken'd to the practice of thoſe Duties they already know? Are they not expoſed to as violent aſſaults of their Ghoſtly Enemies, as their Teachers are, and therefore need the Sword of the Spirit to repel them, as much as they? Yea, are they not more expoſed to Temptations from this evil World, than thoſe are, who

live more retir'd from it, and have less to do with it?

Theoph in Ephes. 6. 4. *Say not*, says *Theophylact*, *that it belongs to the Religious only to read the Scriptures, for it is the duty of every Christian, especially of those who are conversant in the World, since they stand in need of greater help, as being in a storm.*

Besides, since (as you have before seen) the Scriptures are design'd to instruct Lay-persons of all states, ages and ranks, in their respective Duties; unless a sort of Lay-men can be found, who are neither Younger nor Elder, Married nor Unmarried, Superiours nor Inferiours; who are neither in Sickness nor in Health, in Prosperity nor Adversity, that is, such a sort of Laymen, who are in no state, condition or order of Men, none will be found who have not need of the Holy Scriptures.

Obj. It will perhaps be said, *That it is not necessary to this, that they search the Scriptures themselves; It is sufficient that they take them upon trust from their Teachers.*

To which I return these things.

Answ. 1. That our Saviour did not think this sufficient; for he commanded Lay-men, as well as others

Joh. 5.39. not to take matters upon trust, but to *search the Scriptures.* Nor did S. *Paul* think it enough; for as he di-

2 Cor. 1. 13. rected his Epistles to *all the Saints, to all that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus*;

Ephes. 3,4. so he expected that *all* should read them. And though he was guided by an infallible Spirit, yet S. *Luke* thought it a Virtue in the *Bereans*, and highly commends them for it, That *they*

Act. 17. 11. *searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things*, which were spoken by S. *Paul*, *were so.*

2. It

2. It may reaſonably be preſum'd, that thoſe Teachers ſerve no good deſign, who forbid their People to ſearch the Scriptures. For what more likely reaſon can be given, than that they themſelves know that their Doctrines are ſuch, as will not abide the tryal? Would you not ſhrewdly ſuſpect that Man's Honeſty, who having gotten into his hands the Writings of another's Eſtate, in which he confeſſes you are highly intereſs'd, ſhall refuſe to let you ſee them, and confidently tell you, that you ought to know no more of them, than he ſhall think fit to acquaint you with? But

3. Suppoſing your Teachers deal honeſtly with you, it is but a ſmall portion of Scripture that they can acquaint their People with, in compariſon of what they may read at home; Eſpecially the Teachers in the *Church of Rome*, where no more of the Scripture is communicated to thoſe, who do not underſtand the Latine Tongue, than what the Preacher is pleas'd to put into his Sermon, and that commonly is little enough. But in caſe the Scriptures were read in a Language the People underſtood, yet from the tranſient reading, they would carry away but little, and that little would ſoon be forgotten, unleſs kept in mind by reading and meditation. And therefore S. *Chryſoſtom* frequently and earneſtly exhorted his People not to content themſelves with hearing the Scriptures, but to read them alſo privately at home; out of many I ſhall quote a paſſage or two to this purpoſe. *I beſeech you to come to the Church continually, and with diligence attend to the reading of the Divine Scriptures; and not only when you come hither, but alſo at home to take the Divine Books into your hands, and carefully to receive the benefit of the things contain'd in them. Much profit does come from hence; firſt the Tongue by reading is reform'd, then the Soul is wing'd, and carried aloft*, &c. *Let us not I beſeech you careleſly* *Hom. 29. in Genſ.*

lessly neglect so great a gain, but also at home, let us with diligence apply our selves to the reading of the Divine Writings. And in another place, he thus addresses to his Hearers. *Let every one, when he retires home, take the Bible into his hands, and run over the sense of those things that have been spoken, if he desire to reap continual and sufficient benefit from the Scriptures: for bare hearing for two hours, is not sufficient for our security.* These were the lessons this Holy Man inculcated upon those who daily attended to the publick preaching and reading of the word, and who heard the Scriptures read in a language they understood (which is not now permitted in the Roman Church) so necessary in his judgment, was the private reading of the Scripture, that all that was heard in publick would not suffice without it. For it is not enough, that the word of Christ dwell in us sparingly, but

De utilitate Lect. Scrip.

4. It must dwell in us richly, which it can never do, save in those only who frequently read it, and meditate upon it. Some persons I know there are who cannot read; some others who can, live in those unhappy places where they cannot procure Bibles. If these do otherways, what in them lies to attain to the knowledge of the Scriptures, God will *accept them according to that they have, and not according to that they have not*: For unavoidable defects, he will either make allowances, or make a supply some other way. But for others who have both ability and opportunity of reading the *word of Christ*, as it is their bounden duty, so it can argue no less than contempt of God himself to neglect it. For since God hath condescended for their good to write it, how can they chuse but entertain very low thoughts of him, who will not vouchsafe to read it?

2 Cor. 8. 12.

VII. What

VII. What has been ſaid of the need all Men ſtand in of the word of Chriſt, ſuggeſts another argument, *viz.* The great Evils they muſt needs lay themſelves open to who neglect the ſtudy of the Scriptures. For by how much the leſs they know them, by ſo much the leſs muſt they know their duty; and by how much the more ignorant they are of their duty, by ſo much the leſs muſt they practiſe it. Yea, thoſe duties which they are plainly taught by the Law written in their hearts, they will be eaſily perſwaded to neglect: becauſe the great motives to quicken them to theſe, muſt be fetch'd from the Scriptures. And therefore no wonder, that many perſons ſo eagerly purſue the *Pomps and Vanities of this wicked World*, *make proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof*, and are *led captive by the Devil at his pleaſure*, who ſolemnly renounced all theſe in their Baptiſm; becauſe for want of acquaintance with the Scriptures, they are deſtitute of thoſe forces, without which they cannot ſucceſsfully encounter theſe their ſpiritual enemies.

Nor are ſuch perſons in more danger of falling into ſin in matters of Practice, than of being miſ-led in points of Belief; for having no ſolid foundation to bottom their Faith upon, thy will *like Children be toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of Doctrine, by the ſlight of Men, and cunning craftineſs whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* It need not therefore ſeem ſtrange, if many perſons ſhould be ſeduc'd from that *Faith which was once deliver'd to the Saints*, and which they themſelves for ſome time made profeſſion of. In ſhort: *Ignorance of the Scriptures*, (as S. *Chryſoſtom* in his Comment upon my Text tells us) *is the cauſe of all evil.* How deplorable then muſt their condition be, who live in the conſtant diſuſe and neglect of them?

Having

Having already shew'd, That the things which are written were at first address'd to Laymen; That God hath plainly commanded them to acquaint themselves familiarly with them; That the subject matter of the Holy Scriptures, and the uses and ends for which they were written, do concern the Laity; That some special Duties are laid upon them, which no Man can perform, who is not conversant in the Scriptures: Having also shew'd the great need the Laity stand in of them, the inestimable benefits they may receive by them, and the intolerable evils they will expose themselves to in case they neglect the study of them:

VIII. What now remains to quicken you further to this great duty, unless it be to shew the vanity of those objections which are made against it? It may indeed be just matter of wonder, to find any thing objected against a Duty so clear, and of such great moment: Yet so it is, that some Men have dared to say those things which (if they were true) might justly affright the People from it, and make them take it for a Sin, rather than a Duty, to read the Bible.

In general it is said, *That the promiscuous reading of the Scriptures by the vulgar, does more hurt than good.* Because in particular, it occasions their falling into dangerous Errors both in matters of Faith, and in matters of Practice, so that if this liberty should be allow'd, they will neither *believe*, nor *live* so as they ought: Which charge consisting of two parts, the one relating to Belief, the other to Manners, that the answer may be the more clear and satisfactory, I shall consider them distinctly and apart. And

Obj. First, It is objected. *That many pestilent Sects and Heresies which infest the Church, have taken their rise*

riſe from the reading of the Scriptures by Laymen; who for want of being qualified to underſtand them aright, do uſually wreſt them to a pernicious ſenſe.

What is commonly ſaid of the obſcurity of the Scripture, may be conſidered elſewhere. At preſent I return ſeveral things in anſwer to the objection as now propoſed, each of which ſingly conſidered would be a ſufficient anſwer.

1. This reflects foul diſhonour upon God himſelf. For what can be more highly derogatory both to his Wiſdom and Goodneſs, than to ſay, that he hath written ſuch a Book for his People's uſe, which they cannot read, but they will be in danger of being eternally ruin'd by it. If this be ſo, they are then much beholden to thoſe who take the Bible from them, but owe no thanks to God who gave it to them.

2. Our bleſſed Saviour thought the ignorance of the Scriptures the cauſe of Hereſies, and the means he preſcribes to prevent and cure them, is the ſtudy of the Scriptures. *Ye err*, ſaid he to the *Sadducees*; what, becauſe ye ſtudy the Scriptures? No, but *becauſe ye know not the Scriptures.* Matth. 22. 29. And though he very well knew, how maliciouſly the *Jews* were bent, to wreſt the Scriptures to juſtifie their rejection of him; yet does he not reprove them for reading the Scriptures they ſo much abuſed, but contrariwiſe commands to read them again, and more diligently. *Search the Scriptures, for they teſtifie of me.* Joh. 5. 39. As if he had ſaid; You will not yet believe on me, but take me for a Deceiver. I require you therefore not barely to read, but to ſearch the Scriptures (that is, attentively, throughly and impartially to read them) and you will then be convinced that I am indeed the Meſſiah, becauſe they ſo plainly teſtifie of me. This was the method our Saviour preſcribed, for the cure of that damnable Hereſie.

Of

Of the same judgment were his Apostles after him. S. *Jude* to fortifie his beloved Christians against the Heresies of the Gnosticks, commands them, to *remember the words which were spoken before by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The remembrance of the Scripture, was (it seems) in his opinion the best Antidote against the Poison of those Seducers; and this supposes their acquaintance with them, since no Man can remember what he has no knowledge of. Yea, that very Text which is frequently produced to prove that by reading the Scriptures Men fall into Heresies, is on the contrary a plain proof, that the not reading them so much as to become acquainted with them, is the true cause from whence this mischief arises. For who were the Men that wrested the Scriptures to their own destruction? One character of them is, that they were *unlearned*; unlearned in what? in the Holy Scriptures, (for in humane learning S. *Peter* himself was very unlearned.) And if want of learning in the Scriptures, be the cause of falling from the Faith, then doubtless the study of them, will be the best way to establish Men in it. What? could S. *Peter* so much as dream, that the reading of this Epistle by those Lay-Christians to whom he wrote it, would be the way to corrupt their Faith, when he wrote it to them, on purpose to preserve them sound in it? so contrary was his judgment to that of his pretended Successour.

Jude v. 17.

3. Supposing that the reading of the Scriptures hath been to some Laymen an occasion of falling into damnable Heresies; does it thence follow, that they ought not to read them? This is as absurd, as for a Man thus to argue: Some Men by eating have fallen mortally Sick, let no Man therefore for the future eat. Some Men have used their sight to the chusing of a wrong way, it is therefore every Man's duty to put out his eyes.

eyes. The light of the Sun is by many Men abuſed to very ill purpoſes, the Sun therefore it ſelf ought to be extinguiſhed. And is it not an excellent Remedy, for a Man to ſtarve himſelf, that he may not fall ſick by eating? Or for a Man to make himſelf blind, leſt if he ſee, he ſhould chance to miſtake his way? 'Tis true, a Man may loſe his way, that has his eyes in his head; but is he ſure not to loſe it, by putting them out? So a Man by miſtaking the ſenſe of Scripture, may happen to fall into Errors, but he that is altogether unacquainted with it, lays himſelf open to all Deluſions, expoſes himſelf a prey to every Seducer.

4. The manifeſt truth is, that generally ſpeaking, not the Laity, but the Clergy, have been the Authors of Sects and Hereſies. The *Novatian* Sect ſprang from one Prieſt, the *Donatiſt* from two, (though it took its name from a Biſhop, who afterward eſpouſed it.) The *Arian* Hereſie from a Prieſt, the *Pelagian* from a Monk (the Provoſt of *Ban or*) The *Neſtorian* from a Biſhop and Prieſt, the *Eutychian* from a Prieſt, the *Eunomian* from a Biſhop, the *Monothelite* from ſeveral Biſhops joyntly. Even *Bellarmine* himſelf aſſerts, That almoſt all the prime Authors of Hereſie, have been either Prieſts or Biſhops. And for thoſe Laymen, that have been Broachers of Hereſies, they have been (for the moſt part) not of the vulgar ſort, but Men of great parts and learning. Hereſie is indeed a work of the fleſh, but one too fine and ſubtile to be forged in a vulgar Brain, except ſuch Hereſies only as are very ſenſual, groſs, and brutiſh. It is S. *Jerome*'s obſervation, That no Man can be the Founder of an Hereſie who is not a Man of great wit and parts. And therefore

Bell. de Rom. Pontif. l. 2. c. 8. Quanto tamtſi.

Comment. in Oſe. 9.

5. If this way of reaſoning be admitted, the Clergy ſhould be forbidden to read the Scriptures, rather than

the Laity; since they are the Men that have done the greatest mischiefs, by wresting them to the broaching and maintaining of Sects and Heresies. As there are some Church-men, who to shew their great reverence to the Scriptures, do usually compare them to Knives and Swords, (because a man may use them to bad, as well as good purposes), so there are others, who have made good these comparisons, by drawing such Doctrines from them, by which the Church has been miserably wounded, divided and rent into pieces. Should therefore the use of the Bible be denied to all those Orders of Men, of which any persons in those Orders have been found to abuse it; it must be denied to the Clergy too, and by consequence to all Men. And then God may take his Book again to himself: Unless it please him to bestow it upon some other sort of Beings, (if any such there are) that it is fitter for. And yet let it be consider'd

6. That those Heresies which have been broached either by the Clergy or the Laity, are not chargeable upon the Holy Scriptures, any more than darkness upon the Sun when the Earth is eclipsed. For as the darkness proceeds not from the Sun, (which is and ever will be the fountain of light) but from the interposition of the opacous Body of the Moon which intercepts its light; so the true cause of Heresies is not the Scripture, but Mens inordinate Lusts and Passions, which interpose between them and the light of the glorious Gospel of God, which would otherwise have shone into their hearts. Pride and Vain-glory, Covetousness and Sensuality, or some other vice, are the proper fountains, from whence all those Heresies which create disturbance to the Church are derived (as might be shew'd at large.) Such is the power of corrupt affections, that the Man who is sway'd with them, can see

ſee nothing aright, how fairly ſoever repreſented; but will be as apt to wreſt the plaineſt as the moſt obſcure Texts, to his own deſtruction.

Obj. It is objected ſecondly, *That the reading of Scriptures is dangerous to the common People, becauſe thoſe things are recorded in them, which may occaſion their erring in Practice, as well as in Faith. For inſtance,* Noah's *Drunkenneſs,* Lot's *Inceſt,* Jacob's *fraud and lying in getting the bleſſing,* David's *Murther and Adultery,* &c. *Which if expoſed to the view of the vulgar, they may thereby be encouraged and provoked to the imitation of them.*

Anſw. It is ſtrange, that Men who own the Scriptures for the word of the moſt holy God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil,* ſhould have the face to draw up this black charge againſt them.

But were not theſe vicious examples to be found in the Scriptures in our Saviour's days? and yet as they were then freely read by the People, ſo the reading of them was ſo far from being reprehended, that it was approved by him. Were they not in the Scriptures in the days of S. *Paul*? And yet he tells us, *That all Scripture is profitable,* not only for *Doctrine* and *Reproof,* but for *Correction* too, and *Inſtruction in righteouſneſs.* Yea do not the Scriptures themſelves frequently give this teſtimony of themſelves, That they are a Sovereign Preſervative againſt Vice, and that this was one great end to which God deſign'd them? Even young Men, who are moſt obnoxious to the pollution of Sin, by attending to the Scriptures may cleanſe themſelves from it. For, *wherewithal,* ſays *David, ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

2 Tim. 3. 16.

Pſal. 119. 9.

But ſuppoſe, theſe evil examples are of ſuch dangerous conſequence, why are they ſo to the Laity only? Are all the Clergy of ſuch approved virtue, that a Temptation hath no power over them? This is an attainment above the Vulgar, which I preſume the *Roman* Clergy do not yet pretend to.

But for a direct Anſwer to the objection, I propoſe theſe two things in the general. 1. That the Scripture it ſelf hath preſcribed a remedy againſt the evil of theſe Examples. 2. That the examples themſelves are many ways advantageous to our good, for the prevention or cure of Sin, and for the promoting of Virtue in us.

1. The Scripture it ſelf hath preſcribed a Remedy againſt the evil of theſe examples, and that ſeveral ways. 1. By furniſhing us with the moſt eminent examples of the contrary Virtues. 2. By forbidding thoſe very ſins under the ſevereſt penalties. 3. By telling us how ſeverely God hath puniſhed the ſins of many of thoſe good Men. 4. By ſetting before us many dreadful examples of God's judgment upon others for the like ſins.

1. By furniſhing us with the moſt eminent examples of the contrary virtues, which may be as powerful a motive to Good, as the other can be to Evil. If we impartially read the Scriptures, we ſhall find, that the vicious actions of good Men are but few, in compariſon of their vertuous actions there recorded; and whatſoever the ſins be, that ſome of them were ſometimes overtaken with, we ſhall alſo find that not only others, but even they themſelves (for the moſt part) were at other times exemplary for the contrary Duties. I ſhall not ſtay to inſtance in particulars. It may ſuffice, That the holy *Jeſus* is in Scripture ſet before us as ſuch an illuſtrious Pattern, not

not only of this or that, but of all kinds of Moral Goodneſs, as will to every attentive conſidering perſon, be of greater force to excite to virtue, than the ſins of all good Men there regiſtred, taken together, can be to provoke to the contrary.

2. By forbidding thoſe very ſins under the ſevereſt penalties. What though in telling the Story of the evil actions of good Men, it does not always paſs a cenſure upon them? It was not needful it ſhould do ſo, becauſe God hath expreſly condemn'd them by his Law. It is the Law of God that is our only Rule. Examples therefore are to be judg'd by Precepts, and all Examples to be concluded bad, ſo far as they do not agree with the Rule.

3. The Scriptures alſo tell us, how ſeverely God has puniſhed the ſins of many of thoſe good Men. He will have no encouragement to imitate *David* in his Murther and Adultery, who conſiders that diſmal train of puniſhments that follow'd at the heels of them. For though God upon his Repentance forgave the eternal puniſhment, yet he viſited his iniquity with rods, and his ſin with ſcourges; he puniſhed him even to example in this World, to the end, that others might ſee and fear, and do no more ſo preſumptuouſly. Nor can that Man be encouraged to fraud and lying by *Jacob's* example in getting the bleſſing, who duly conſiders, how very dear thoſe ſins afterward coſt him.

4. We find in Scripture many dreadful examples of God's Judgments upon others for the like ſins, on purpoſe to deter us from them. S. *Paul* ſays thus of the Plagues God brought upon the *Iſraelites* in the Wilderneſs. *Theſe things were our examples, to the intent that we ſhould not luſt after evil things, as they alſo luſted: neither be ye Idolaters as were ſome of them; neither let us commit Fornication as ſome of them committed, and fell in one* 1 Corinth. 10. 7, 8, 9, 19.

day

day three and twenty Thousand; Neither let us tempt Christ as some of them tempted, and were destroyed of Serpents; neither murmur as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the Destroyer. Now all these things happened to them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the World are come. Let Men but carefully read, and seriously lay to heart these, and other such terrible examples we find in Scripture, of God's vengeance upon Men for their sins, and this doubtless will be a powerful Antidote against the infection of bad Example. Thus you see that whatsoever ill use some Men may be enclin'd to make of the sins of good Men recorded in Scripture, the Scripture it self hath provided a sufficient Remedy against it. But this is not all:

2. The sins of good Men recorded in Scripture may be highly beneficial to us, both for the preserving us from sin, and the promoting of Holiness in us, And that several ways.

1. As they are a confirmation of the truth of the Sacred History, and by consequence more fully assure us, that those dreadful punishments there recorded as inflicted by God upon sinners, are not cunningly devised fables, but the most indubitable Truths. For can we think, that the Penmen of these Books were not Men of the greatest sincerity, such as would report nothing but what they knew to be true, when we find, that they did not conceal those things, that were most disgraceful to themselves? Thus *Moses* relates his own Faults, *viz.* his neglect to circumcise his Son, his great backwardness to go upon that errand upon which God sent him, his not sanctifying the name of God at the Waters of *Meribah*, and how the anger of God was kindled against him for these sins. *David* hath left a memorial to all Posterity of such enormous sins committed

Exod. 4. 10, 13, 14, 24, 25.

Numb. 20. 12, 13.

mitted by himſelf, which the more ingenuous ſort of Heathens abhorr'd the very thoughts of. S. *Peter* hath given a more particular account than any of the other Evangeliſts, of his own denial and abjuration of his Maſter, in the Goſpel written by S. *Mark*; (for that Goſpel was dictated by S. *Peter*, S. *Mark* was only the *Amanuenſis*). Pſal. 51.

2. As they ſerve to beat down ſpiritual Pride, and to make us more humble, by repreſenting to us our own vileneſs, in the foul ſins of others who were better than our ſelves. And by how much the more humble, by ſo much the more holy we are; Humility being not only a Grace it ſelf, but the Parent and Nurſe of many other excellent Graces.

3. As they quicken us to greater watchfulneſs againſt ſin, make us more careful to avoid all occaſions, and to repreſs the very firſt motions toward evil. This uſe the Apoſtle teaches us: for having ſhew'd how ſhamefully the *Iſraelites* ſinn'd, and how remarkably they were puniſh'd, he concludes, *Wherefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall.* 1 Corinth. 10. 12.

4. As they teach us to lift up our eyes and our hearts unto God, from whom alone cometh our help; to implore continually the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, to inable us to ſubdue our evil inclinations, to withſtand all the Temptations of the World, the Fleſh and the Devil, and by patient continuance in well doing to ſeek for glory and honour and immortality.

5. As they teach us Thankfulneſs to God for his preventing and aſſiſting Grace, in caſe we have withſtood thoſe Temptations, which other good Men have been overcome by, and preſerv'd from thoſe ſins into which they have fallen: ſince it is not by any ſtrength originally in our ſelves, but by the Grace of God, that we ſtand. And by how much the more thankful any Man

Man is for the Grace he hath already received, by so much the more he may expect.

6. As they teach us to be charitable in our Censures of others, and not presently to conclude a Man lost, though he fall into some great sin, but endeavour to restore him again with the spirit of meekness. But

7. If through our neglect and carelessness we fall into any great sin, we are by these examples encouraged to rise again. What greater encouragement to Repentance than the hope of a pardon in case we repent? And this we can have no reason to despair of, when we find that others who fell into as foul sins, were actually pardon'd, and received into God's favour upon their Repentance. Thus we see how those evil examples we meet with in the holy Scripture, may be highly advantagious to our spiritual Good.

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THE APPLICATION.

1. FRom what hath been ſaid it plainly follows, That thoſe Teachers who withhold the Scriptures from the Vulgar, have not that regard they ought to have, either to the Commandments of God, or to the good of their People. How careful thoſe of the *Church of Rome* are to keep the People from being acquainted with them, either by hearing them in publick, or by reading them in private is well known.

It is true, that Leſſons out of the Scriptures, and Epiſtles and Goſpels, are read in their publick Service, but how are they read? In a language that the Vulgar do not underſtand; that is ſo, as that they know as little of them after they are read, as they did before; As the darkneſs is as great when a Candle is in the houſe, as when there is none, if that Candle be hid under a Buſhel.

But if they give the People ſo little of the Bible in publick, do they not make ſome amends for this, by allowing them the free uſe of it in private? I anſwer, No. No Man is allow'd to read, or ſo much as to have the Bible in the Vulgar tongue (though tranſlated by thoſe of their own Church) without a Licence from the Biſhop of the Dioceſs, or the Inquiſitor, with the advice of the Pariſh Prieſt or Confeſſor; which Licence they muſt have in writing. And if any Man ſhall preſume without ſuch Licence either to read or have it, he may not receive Abſolution of his ſins, unleſs he firſt deliver up his Bible to his Ordinary. This is the ſtanding Law

Rule 4th of the *Index Expurg.* made by order of the Council of *Trent.*

of the *Church of Rome*, eſtabliſh'd by the authority of the Council of *Trent*, and confirm'd not only by Pope *Pius* IV. but by many ſucceeding Popes; which, becauſe I have heard confidently denyed, by ſome of their ignorant Proſelytes, I will therefore refer them to a late Author in their own language (to whom I preſume they will give credit) who in his Chapter of reading the Holy Scriptures, gives this Character of a Papiſt. *It is true he does not think it* (*viz.* the Holy Scripture) *fit to be read generally by all without a Licence, or in the vulgar Tongue.* And having told you why he does not think ſo, he adds: *For theſe reaſons he is taught, that it is not convenient for the Scripture to be read indifferntly by all Men, but only by ſuch as have expreſs Licence, and good teſtimony from their Curates*, &c. And is not this courſe as effectual, to keep the generality of the Laity from reading the Scripture, as the abſolute forbidding it would have been? For how few will be at the trouble and charge of procuring a Faculty, when it cannot be had but from the Biſhop or Inquiſitor? Or if many were willing to be at the pains and coſt, yet few of thoſe many will be able to obtain it: For how few will be able to ſatisfie the Biſhop or Curate, that they are ſuch as will receive no hurt by reading, when they cannot ſo much as ask it without being ſuſpected of Hereſie? So that all things conſider'd, it may reaſonably be preſumed, that the effect of ſuch Licences will amount to little or nothing. And yet how little ſoever it be, it was thought too much to be granted: For by the Order of Pope *Clement* VIII. this obſervation is added to the Rule: *That hitherto by the Command and practice of the holy Roman and univerſal Inquiſition, the Faculty of granting ſuch Licences for reading or keeping Bibles in the vulgar Tongue, or any ſummaries or hiſtorical compendiums of the ſaid Bibles, is taken away, which is to be inviolably obſerved.* And if no ſuch Licence can

A Papiſt Miſrepreſented and Repreſented, &c. c. 10.

can be legally granted, then no Man of what quality ſoever can read the Scripture in the vulgar Tongue, without tranſgreſſing the Laws of the Roman Church.

I am not ignorant, that in this Kingdom, and I ſuppoſe, in ſome others, where the Reformation hath got conſiderable footing, ſome Lay-perſons of that Communion, are permitted to have the Bible in their own Tongue. But this permiſſion is directly contrary to their Laws, and extorted from them in theſe Countries to prevent a greater miſchief which they ſee would otherwiſe enſue; If you make enquiry in *Spain* or *Italy*, you will find no ſuch indulgence there. I ſhall add only this. That in the Index of prohibited Books publiſhed by Pope *Alexander* VII. not only thoſe Bibles that are tranſlated and printed by Hereticks, but all Bibles in any vulgar Tongue are abſolutely prohibited.

2. Let us then be thankful to God, and bleſs and praiſe, and ſpeak good of his name, for that we have been born and brought up in a Church, which allows free liberty of ſearching the Holy Scriptures; and not only ſo, but lays it as a Duty upon all Men, and endeavours to quicken them thereunto by the moſt powerful motives. How earneſt our Church is in preſſing this Duty upon her Children, you may ſee in her *exhortation to the reading of the holy Scriptures*, a ſmall part of which I ſhall tranſcribe, deſiring you at your leiſure attentively to read the whole. Thus then ſhe beſpeaks us: *If we profeſs Chriſt, why are we not aſham'd to be ignorant of his Doctrine? Seeing that every Man is aſhamed to be ignorant in that learning which he profeſſeth. That Man is aſham'd to be call'd a Philoſopher, which readeth not the Books of Philoſophy; and to be call'd a Lawyer, an Aſtronomer or Phyſician, that is ignorant in the Books of Law, Aſtronomy and Phyſick. How can any Man then ſay, that he profeſſeth Chriſt and his Religion, if he will not apply himſelf (as*

far forth as he can or may conveniently) to read and hear, and so to know the Books of Christ's Gospel and Doctrine? Although other Sciences be good and to be learned, yet no Man can deny, but this is the chief, and passeth all other incomparably. What excuse shall we therefore make (at the last day before Christ) that delight to hear or read Mens phantasies and inventions, more than his most Holy Gospel? and will find no time to do that, which chiefly (above all things) we should do? and will rather read other things than that, for the which we ought rather to leave reading of all other things. Let us therefore apply our selves, as far as we can have time and leisure, to know God's word, by diligent hearing and reading thereof, as many as profess God, and have faith and trust in him. And having shew'd the vanity of those excuses, which are commonly made by those who have no good affection for the Scripture, she concludes, *Surely none be Enemies to the reading of God's word, but such as are either so ignorant, that they know not how wholsome a thing it is; or else be so sick, that they hate the most comfortable Medicine that should heal them; or so ungodly, that they would wish the People still to continue in blindness and ignorance of God.* Whereupon she earnestly renews her Exhortation, in these words. *Let us thank God heartily, for this his great and special gift, beneficial favour, and fatherly providence. Let us be glad to receive this special gift of our Heavenly Father. Let us hear, read and know these Holy Rules, Injunctions and Statutes of our Christian Religion. Let us with fear and reverence lay up in the Chest of our Hearts these necessary and fruitful Lessons. Let us night and day muse, and have meditation and contemplation in them,* &c. And yet as if she thought not this enough, *in the Information for them which take offence at certain places of the Holy Scripture,* she

ſhe renews the Exhortation again, and preſſes it with variety of cogent Arguments.

So far is the *Church of England* from declining the Holy Scriptures, that ſhe thinks ſhe can never too vehemently preſs her Children to ſearch into them. She knows her Doctrines will abide the Trial, and therefore deſires they may be expoſed to the open light, being confident, that the more they are examined, the more they will be approved. As ſhe hath taken nothing from the Scriptures, ſo neither hath ſhe added any new Doctrines contrary to them, and therefore need not conceal any part of them in an unknown tongue.

3. How great then is their Sin, who while they own themſelves members of this Church, do ſeldom take the word of God into their hands, much leſs lay it up in their Hearts; make it no part of their meditation and ſtudy. God will not impute to their condemnation the not reading of the Bible, whoſe lot is fallen in thoſe unhappy places where they can by no means procure it. But for us, who have not only free liberty to read it, but are ſo earneſtly preſſed by our Church to make it the matter of our ſtudy; if we uſe it no more, than thoſe who are forbidden the uſe of it, what Apology can we make for our ſelves? Our ſin, alas! is wilful, and utterly inexcuſable; a plain contempt of God, and our Duty, and therefore our puniſhment will be more grievous and intolerable. This will be our Condemnation, that light is riſen to us, but we ſhut our eyes, and will not ſuffer it to ſhine into our hearts, becauſe our deeds are evil; *for every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* Joh. 3. 19, 20.

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4. Be then exhorted to apply your ſelves to the ſtudy of the Holy Scriptures; let us take all opportunities of hearing them when read and preached in publick; and not only ſo, but of acquainting our ſelves more familiarly with them in private: let us with *David* make them our daily Companions, our delight and our Counſellors.

If either the love of God or of our ſelves; If the conſideration of our Duty or of our Intereſt, of our preſent or future good will ſway with us, we ſhall need no other Motives, than thoſe arguments already propoſed, which I therefore beſeech you ſeriouſly to reflect upon.

Many I know pretend, that they have ſo much other buſineſs, that they can find no leiſure to look into the Scriptutes. I deſire thoſe perſons who make this Plea, to conſider theſe few things:

1. Have you any buſineſs of greater concernment than this? Can any thing be of greater moment than to know wherein your true happineſs conſiſts, and what conditions are required of you in order to the attainment of it? Can any thing be more neceſſary, than to be acquainted with your Duty, and with thoſe powerful Motives that may prevail with you to practiſe it? Is not this the *one* thing neceſſary? So our Saviour thought. *Martha, Martha*, ſays he, *thou art careful and troubled about many things but there is one thing needful, and Mary hath choſen the better part.* And what was that one thing needful that *Mary* had choſen, but to ſit at Chriſt's Feet and hear his word, that ſhe might do it?

Luke 10. 41, 42.

2. You who pretend you have no leiſure for reading the Scriptures, do not many of you find time enough for worthleſs impertinent matters? if not alſo for ſuch as are hurtful? Do you not ſpend hour after hour in light and trifling diſcourſe? Have you not time for Feaſts, and merry mettings, for Cards and Dice,

Dice, for Taverns and Play-Houſes? How many morning hours (more than need) do many perſons ſpend in their Beds, or in attiring themſelves when they get up? Who cannot find one hour to ſpare for ſtudying the will of God. And are theſe matters of ſuch great concernment?

3. Many of you who ſeem to ſpend your time to better purpoſes, what are the great buſineſſes you lay it out upon? What? but to heap up riches, and to raiſe your fortunes in the World? And are theſe matters of ſuch weight, that they deſerve to be put in the ballance againſt your everlaſting concernments? Is it more neceſſary to leave a rich Heir behind you, than to enrich your Souls with the treaſures of Divine Knowledge and Grace? when God ſhall call you to your great Accounts, will he, think you, take this for a good Plea? Lord my time was all little enough for the getting of ſuch an Eſtate, and therefore I pray thee have me excuſed for neglecting to ſtudy thy Word.

4. You who can find no time for enquiring into the word of God, conſider ſeriouſly, That you muſt ſhortly find a time to die in. When death comes, it will not be put off to a more convenient ſeaſon; but will force you, whether you will or no, to be at leiſure; and will effectually convince you, that you had time enough, had you but had hearts to uſe it, for acquainting your ſelves with the Holy Scriptures. For if you be not then quite beſotted (as many perſons are, by the long courſe of a ſenſual worldly life, and by God's juſt judgment upon them) theſe and ſuch like, will be your ſad reſentments. I am now going to make my appearance before the great and righteous Judge of all the World, and what ſhall I ſay, who have had ſo little reſpect to his Word by which I muſt be judged, that I have not vouchſafed to read it?

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Can I ſay, that I had not leiſure? I cannot be ſo impudent, when I found time not only for a thouſand impertinent trifles, but for my Vices. O that I had ſpent that time in devout meditation on the Law of God, that I miſ-ſpent in ſenſual Pleaſure, or in heaping up of Riches! O that that time had been laid out in beautifying and adorning my Soul with Divine Grace, that was laid out in enquiring after Faſhions, in getting fine Cloaths, and in dreſſing my Body *A la mode*! But woe and alas! theſe wiſhes are vain, and to no purpoſe; It is now too late, the time is paſt, and will never return again. Conſider therefore

5. That the true reaſon why you do not find time to read the Bible, is not want of leiſure, but want of inclination and affection to it. You can find nothing there, that ſuits with your carnal and worldly Appetites. The thoughts of God, and of the things of another World, are ſuch as you can take no pleaſure in, and the groſs and ſenſual entertainments of this World, are the only things you have a reliſh for. But then conſider withal, that unleſs the temper of your Souls be changed before you die, unleſs you become new Creatures, and get a taſte and reliſh for the things above, you are not ſo much as capable of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

FINIS.